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DGCA LIFTS BAN ON BOEING 737 MAX AFTER TWO-AND-HALF YRS

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation on Thursday withdrew the ban on the aircraft's commercial flight operations in India

CHANGES MADE TO ENHANCE SAFETY ASPECTS

DGCA grounded all Boeing 737 Max planes in India after the crash of an Ethiopian Airlines 737 Max plane near Addis Ababa in March 2019, which killed 157 people, including four Indians. The plane's flight control software had serious flaws, which sent the aircraft into fatal nosedives. Boeing has made several changes to the software and hardware for airworthiness

SPICEJET THE SOLE CARRIER WITH 737 MAX

- In its order, the DGCA cited the clearance granted to Boeing 737 MAX aircraft by 17 regulators worldwide, including the US. China is the only major country yet to allow the aircraft to fly again
- In India, only SpiceJet has Boeing 737 Max aircraft in its fleet. The low-cost carrier plans to deploy the plane from next month

Mar 13, 2019
WHEN D.G.C.A. ORDERED GROUNDING OF ALL BOEING 737 MAX PLANES

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

KABUL CARNAGE

Two serial blasts rock Afghan capital; 12 US soldiers and children among over 70 killed, 140 hurt; no outfit claims role but ISIS-Khorasan's hand seen

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

AT least 72 people, including children, were reportedly killed and over 140 injured in two suspected suicide blasts in Kabul on Thursday evening. Twelve US military personnel, too, were among the victims, and 15 were wounded, General Kenneth McKenzie, head of the US Central Command, said at a briefing in Washington. While there was no official confirmation on the number of locals killed in the blasts, media reports quoting Afghan health officials on the ground put the number at 60. The casualties could go up as many are fighting for life. A few Taliban fighters were also injured in the blasts.

The first explosion went off in a crowd of people waiting to enter the airport near the Abbey Gate. Reports said shots were fired soon after. Thousands of Afghans had gathered at the gates trying to gain access to the airport, hoping to catch a flight to safety. The second blast happened hours later, near the Baron Hotel in the city. A few days ago, the US military had lifted 169 Americans from that hotel using choppers. It is now said to be housing UK's evacuees.

Videos from the scene showed dozens of bodies strewn across a sewage canal and the surrounding banks outside the airport.

"We can confirm that a number of US service members were killed in today's complex attack at Kabul airport. A number of others are being treated for wounds," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby tweeted, adding that "a number of Afghans" were also killed in the attack.

While no group claimed responsibility for the attacks, the US and other Western governments believe the blasts were triggered by the Islamic State's regional affiliate, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), which is opposed to the Taliban.

The Taliban had shot dead one of the group's top leaders in Afghanistan, hours after taking over the Kabul prison where he was held.

The blasts came a day after US defence officials warned of terror attacks near the airport. On Wednesday, the US Embassy in Kabul had urged people to avoid travelling to the airport unless given specific instructions were given.

Meanwhile, US evacuation flights continued to take off from the airport. Some countries including Canada have announced they were halting their airlift evacuations in view of the deteriorating situation.

Wounded women arrive at a hospital after suffering injuries in the blast outside the Kabul airport on Thursday | AFP

1 Suicide bomber blows himself up near the Abbey Gate to the airport, at 5:10 pm local time

2 2nd blast occurred near Baron Hotel, where foreigners were waiting to be evacuated. Last week, 169 US citizens were airlifted from the hotel to the airport in choppers

U.S. WARNING TO CITIZENS

On Wednesday, US defence officials had warned of attacks on the crowds gathered outside the Kabul airport. The US Embassy in Kabul had specifically asked its citizens to leave Abbey Gate, East Gate, and North Gate of the airport immediately. The UK, too, had issued a similar warning to British nationals in Afghanistan

CURRENT PRIORITIES

Evacuation of Indian nationals, safety of our diplomatic personnel

Assistance to Afghan nationals in distress

Providing leadership - Neighbourhood First

International coordination and humanitarian efforts

EVAC STATS

Embassy personnel 175

Other Indian nationals 263

INSIDE AFGHANS CLING TO EVACUATION HOPES | IMRAN FOR POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT | P11

Wait-and-watch policy on Taliban

India must play larger role: Gowda

As the security situation in Afghanistan remains volatile, former PM HD Deve Gowda on Thursday said India has a larger humanitarian and statesmanly role to play. He also suggested that the country should explore an independent and meaningful role in the region. P9

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

DESCRIBING the security situation in Afghanistan as critical, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday told an all-party meeting of floor leaders in Parliament here that India is adopting a wait-and-watch approach in dealing with the Taliban. The priority now is full evacuation of Indian nationals.

The long term interest is in retaining robust friendship with the Afghans, Jaishankar told the meeting attended by 37 leaders from 31 political parties.

The leaders were first briefed by Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla. Jaishankar then took questions.

Responding to one of the 26 questions, Jaishankar admitted that the Doha process for a smooth transfer of power had not fructified. He also said there was no clarity on when US forces would be withdrawn completely from Kabul.

Fielding questions on the government's Taliban policy, he said: "It would be foolhardy to take a policy call on Kabul. India should avoid the path where events force it to take a decision and that too without assimilating the facts."

He also refuted allegations that India had been isolated on the global stage, saying leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, UK Foreign Minister Dominic Raab, Saudi Arabian State Foreign Minister Adel Aljubeir have all been in touch with New Delhi. Also, India chaired a special session at the United Nations Security Council on Afghanistan two days after the Taliban seized power.

India has so far evacuated 565 people from Afghanistan.

Drone policy liberalised for usage across sectors

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

TAKING a big leap in promoting drone usage across sectors, the Ministry of Civil Aviation on Thursday liberalised its rules, cutting down the number of forms to be filled and approvals sought.

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said the new rules aim to simplify procedures and reducing the compliance burden. The number of forms to be filled to operate them have now been brought down from 25 to 6.

"We are all set to usher in a new era of drone usage in India.. We're going to ensure drone application in transportation, logistic, defence, mining, infrastructure sectors and more. It will provide more jobs. Our aim is to make India a global drone hub by 2030," said the minister.

He added that the new rules could make the concept of air taxis a reality in the days ahead. "Air taxis are being researched and invented globally and many startups are coming up. The time is not far when taxis, like the ones of Uber, etc, that you see on roads, you will see in the air under the drone policy. I believe this is very much possible," he said.

As per the new rules, approvals for the unique authorisation number, unique prototype identification number, certificate of conformance, certificate of maintenance, import clearance, acceptance of existing drones, operator permits, authorisation of R&D organisation, student remote pilot licence, remote pilot instructor authorisation, drone port authorisation, etc have been abolished.

Besides, no pilot licence is required for micro drones (for non-commercial use), nano drone and for R&D organisations. Also, there will be no restriction on drone operations by foreign-owned companies registered in India.

EXPRESS READ

CBI registers nine cases related to WB violence

New Delhi: The CBI has registered nine cases related to post-poll violence in West Bengal, sources said on Thursday. All the four special units of the investigating agency tasked to probe the cases of violence have moved their units from Kolkata to crime scenes across the state, they said. P10

Will supply 20 cr doses in Sept, SII to Centre

New Delhi: Serum Institute of India (SII) has informed the Centre that it will be able to supply around 20 crore doses of Covishield in September itself to Government to India and private hospitals, sources said. The Pune-based SII has already supplied 12 crore doses of the Covid-19 vaccine in August, they said.

Experts advise caution as calls for Ganesha festivities grow

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

WHILE Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta on Thursday said Covid-19 guidelines for Ganesha festival could be revised, based on the reduction or rise in Covid cases, right-wingers are demanding public celebrations and processions during the festival, though such events could potentially become super-spreader events leading to a third wave of the pandemic in the state.

The State Government had recently issued guidelines banning any public celebrations or processions during the festival to prevent a surge in Covid-19 cases across Karnataka.

However, earlier this week, senior BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal urged Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai not to impose restrictions on public celebrations of Ganesha Chaturthi or any other Hindu festival and threatened that even if the Chief Minister imposed restrictions (during Ganesha festival) he would not remain silent.

In Mangaluru, Sri Rama Sene's state general secretary Anand Shetty Adyar on Thursday threatened to stage a dharna in front of offices of BJP legislators in Dakshina Kannada district from August 30 if the district administration does not allow public celebrations of Ganesha Chaturthi, by August 29.

CONTINUED ON: P7

Mysuru gang rape: Perpetrators filmed act, threatened victim

Police personnel at the spot where a woman was allegedly gang-raped, in Mysuru on Thursday | UDAYSHANKAR S

KARTHIK K K @ Mysuru

ONGOING investigation into the gang rape and sexual assault of a college student at the foothills of Chamundi Hills in Mysuru on Tuesday night has revealed that the attackers had filmed the act and had even threatened the victim and her friend of uploading it on social media if they approached the police.

After the incident triggered outrage across the state, a special investigation team has been constituted under the supervision of ADGP Pratap Reddy, which inspected the scene of crime on Thursday. Sources said that over 34 articles and crucial evidence have been recovered from the spot based on which the police are on the trail of the culprits.

The team also recovered liquor bottles from the crime scene near Lalithadripura and are tracking the bar codes of the bottles to trace the shop and collect the footage of the buyers. The police are also rounding up those involved in eve-teasing.

But a major challenge is the fact that the police are yet to record the statement of the survivor who is undergoing treatment for multiple injuries in the city and is in a state of shock. ADGP Pratap Reddy said, "It is a big task as we still don't have a statement, but we have put together a very good team and involved all the technical agencies and staff from across the state to crack the case."

Sources also revealed that the police are reviewing cell phone tower data in the area that were active between 7 pm and 8.30 pm on Tuesday and have shortlisted several numbers from which they hope to get some leads. P4

Home minister stirs row with remarks, CM disapproves

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

HOME Minister Araga Jnanendra courted controversy on Thursday when he remarked that "Congress is attempting to rape the Home Minister" and even suggested that the victim should not have ventured into a secluded place late in the evening. Hours after he was panned by the opposition Congress, and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai himself expressed disapproval of Jnanendra's statements from New Delhi, the Home Minister expressed regret and withdrew his remarks.

On Thursday, while responding to the Opposition's criticism of the State Government over the Mysuru gang rape, Jnanendra accused the Congress of politicising a sensitive issue when the government was trying its best to nab the accused. "It is an inhuman act. The Congress is attempting to rape the Home minister. The Congress is trying to politicise it," Jnanendra said. P4

JAB-O-METER TAKE YOUR SHOT

August 25: 66,22,337 doses
August 26: 67,87,305 doses
TOTAL DOSES: 61,10,43,573

NATIONWIDE	AUG 25	AUG 26
Fresh cases	37,593	46,164
Recoveries	34,169	34,159
Deaths	648	607

KARNATAKA	AUG 25	AUG 26
Fresh cases	1,224	1,213
Recoveries	1,668	1,206
Deaths	22	25

WITH THIS ISSUE
CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE
36 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

Curtains down for Bhagel? Last-ditch bid to stay CM

RICHA SHARMA/EJAZ KAISER
@ New Delhi/Raipur

THE ongoing power struggle within the Chhattisgarh Congress took a new turn with the party's leadership directing Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel to respect the agreement of rotational CM he accepted two-and-a-half years ago and smoothly transfer power to his cabinet colleague T S Singh Deo.

The Baghel camp hasn't yielded yet, as a large number of MLAs on his side, including a couple of ministers and some senior leaders, flew into Delhi late Thursday evening to parade their support before the party high command.

Baghel is scheduled to meet former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday.

Rahul had met both Baghel and Deo early this week to sort out the mess. "During the meeting, Baghel was told to follow the rotational formula he had agreed to after the Assembly elections in 2018. The party wanted to do this through consensus but now he is getting his camp MLAs to put pressure to stay in power," said sources, adding the change of guard is unlikely to be easy now. Baghel's tenure reached its halfway mark on June 17.

For his part, Deo claimed there was no such power sharing formula. Both leaders have, however, maintained that they will abide by decision of party high command.

DECKS CLEARED

Centre okays all nine nominations for SC judges

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Union Government on Thursday notified all the nine recommendations of the collegium for elevation as Supreme Court judges. With this, the decks will be cleared for India to have its first woman Chief Justice in 2027.

With these appointments, the working strength of the Supreme Court will rise from 24 to 33. The sanctioned strength of the top court is 34 and it is currently functioning with 10 vacancies.

Nine new judges, including three women, were elevated to the Supreme Court with President Ram Nath Kovind signing their warrants of appointment. The judges will take oath on August 31.

The new judges of the top court include Justice B V Nagarathna of the Karnataka High Court, who will be in line to be the first woman Chief Justice of India (CJI) in September 2027. Justice Bela M Trivedi, Justice Hema Kohli, Justice C T Ravikumar, Justice M M Sundresh, and senior advocate and former Additional Solicitor General P S Narasimha. Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka, Justices Vikram Nath and Jitendra Kumar Maheshwari are also among those appointed to the Supreme Court.

Three of the nine judges — Justices Vikram Nath and B V Nagarathna and Senior Advocate P S Narasimha — will go on to become the Chief Justice of India. Justice Nagarathna's tenure as CJI will be for only 36 days, if appointments are made as per seniority. P5